

# Awakening the Bear;

## A Study of Memory & Democracy in Post-Communist Eastern Europe

Master of Arts Thesis

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Summer 2014

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*“He who controls the past controls the future. He who controls the present controls the past.”*  
‘1984’, George Orwell

## Introduction

This year marks 25 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall and with it, the Iron Curtain.

The Cold War left a mark on Europe that is still visible today. The ‘holding hostage’ of much of East and Central Europe by Soviet Communist ideology has, since its collapse, left some former communist states struggling to realise true democracy; leaving them on the periphery of a uniting Europe. For the majority of the former Eastern Bloc, European Union (EU) accession has been the reward for successful transition to liberal democracy. However, for the successor of the Soviet Union, this has not been the case.

Despite Communism failing in Russia, as it did across the expanse of Eastern Europe; Russia has sought neither EU membership nor liberal democracy. With a pitiable reputation for human rights, fragile relations with neighbouring states and political backsliding into authoritarianism, it is a pertinent time to consider why Russia has chosen such a solitary path.

As Europe embraces an increasingly united agenda, events unfolding in Ukraine seem to signal that “...a slow divorce between Russia and the West is quietly underway.”<sup>1</sup>

## Research Question

The preceding observations have led to the following research question;

“Why have some former Communist states achieved greater levels of democracy than others?”

This paper sets out to explore the causes of variance in democracy in former Eastern Bloc states focusing, in this instance, on the theme of memory; ‘collective’ and ‘historical’, to determine a possible

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<sup>1</sup> Kendall, B (2014) Muddying the Waters in Ukraine, BBC Article, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-27017707?SThisFB>

correlation between ‘memory policy’; that is, how states remember certain historical events; and democracy.

## Literature Review

### Theories

The need for greater understanding of the democratic transitions of Eastern Europe that occurred in the years following 1989 has engaged many a scholar.

While democracy itself has a plurality of definitions, fundamentally it is the notion derived from ancient Greek etymology, from the word ‘demokratia’, as ‘the rule of the people’. However, its meaning extends beyond the merely institutional or political and into the domain of human rights and freedoms.

I appreciate that democracy can be accessed via a number of different debates, however I have chosen to examine a theoretical line of reasoning that holds particular curiosity. The emergence of the unbearable horrors of the Holocaust brought memory and memorialisation into sharp relief, leading to a sizeable body of work on the subject. It is this body of work that I will use to determine a causal link between memory and democracy.

The thesis therefore leans on a number of interconnected theories. Firstly, that of Maurice Halbwachs (1980) who crafted the idea of ‘collective’ and ‘historical’ memory; the former being socially constructed while the latter seeks to find objective historical truth.

Halbwachs wanted to move away from the theories of Freud, who alleged that memory is located solely in the individual conscience and motivated by a need to suppress recollection of painful experiences. Halbwachs believed instead that the individual requires a group context “in order to remember in any coherent and persistent fashion” (Olick 1998; 109).

Following this, Cohen’s (2000) theory that denial is normalised in society; or is “shared, social, collective and organised and able to be built into the ideological facade of the state” and Connerton’s (1989; 14) claim that “oppressive regimes use state apparatus to deprive its citizens of their memory” are also drawn upon in this thesis. Barbara Misztal’s (2005) social theory attests to the use and usefulness of memory; that remembering the past, in order to work through it, is a pre-cursor to democracy. Her theory is in opposition to that of Nietzsche who claimed that “the past has to be forgotten if it is not to become the gravedigger of the present”(Nietzsche 1874).

One of the most prolific modern proponents of democracy is John Keane. His studies link Jürgen Habermas' (1981) theory of universal participation of individual actors and the importance of an active public sphere, to Aristotle, Plato, Kant and Hegel's theories of self-determination and people's separation from state apparatus and influence, and to Ernest Gellner's (1994; 198) definition of this as "a natural condition of human freedom." Keane's democratic theory is linked to societal freedom. Freedom of thought or 'free will' is in itself an inherently democratic principle, and one to which the concept of memory also belongs.

A parallel view is shared by Hannah Arendt (1998) who believed that a community or 'polis' held the responsibility for remembrance for the benefit of future generations. What the polis established, then, was "a space where *organized remembrance* could take place and where, as a result, the mortality of actors and the fragility of human deeds could be partially overcome" (Passerin d'Entrève 2002; 76). This reflects Barbara Mizstal (2005) and Theodor Adorno's (2003) philosophy of the importance of 'working through the past' in order to learn from its mistakes.

Finally, Habermas, who dedicated his life to the task of promoting morality and ethics, insisted that the uniqueness of the Holocaust was a fundamental foundation for re-establishing human dignity, achieved through critical self-reflection (Schiller 2012; 45). He reproached the theories of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida for lacking such logic. As with Immanuel Kant, respect for 'the Other' was at the centre of Habermas' theory - acceptance of which is essential for democracy - and what he deemed the foremost failing of the Nazi regime.

## Summary

Through analysis of 'memory policy', the thesis highlights the differing characteristics of democracy in Russia and Germany – characteristics that can be used to gauge the state of democracy in not only these, but other countries, across the rest of the former 'Eastern Bloc' states.

While the shape and form of memory is often deemed a *product* of democratic society, this paper aims to demonstrate that the way the past is remembered can actually determine the nature and sustainability of democracy.

Illustrating a causal relationship between memory and democracy, this paper finds the criteria of 'integrity' and 'accuracy' of historical memory as fundamental to the development of a democratic society.

At opposite ends of the democratic spectrum, Russia and Germany provide suitably diverging viewpoints and practices regarding memory and what should be done with it.

By ensuring historical accuracy of memory is retained, Germany has created a foundation built on truth, acknowledgment and human and civil rights; cementing its democratic status. In contrast, Russia's falsification, revisionism and denial of historical truth, and its own guilt; used to subvert the collective memory of the population during the period of Putin's rule, weakens its claims of democracy.

## Hypothesis

My research centres on the following hypothesis;

The higher the level of 'integrity' in state 'memory policy', the greater the level of democracy

## Operationalisation

### Dependent Variable – Democracy

As iterated above, democracy is defined as the 'rule of the people', as opposed to any "aristocrat, monarch, philosopher, bureaucrat, expert, or religious leader" (Shapiro 1999; 29). Its workings are elaborated by Weale (1999; 14);

"[I]n a democracy, important public decisions on questions of law and policy depend, directly or indirectly, upon public opinion formally expressed by citizens of the community, the vast bulk of whom have equal political rights."

This defends the principles of social equality and participation; including human and civil rights and freedoms of the population.

Democracy can be measured. Raymond Gastil developed a set of indices and measures for assessing the level of democratic development and set the rules for conducting assessments of these criteria as attributes of democracy. These became the annual *Freedom in the World* survey; published by Freedom House since 1972, offering impartial measurements of democracy by evaluating political rights and civil liberties across over 195 countries and 14 territories. Ratings are on a scale of 1 to 7. Freedom House assigns countries an overall status of 'Free' (1.0 to 2.5), 'Partly Free' (3.0 to 5.0), or 'Not Free' (5.5 to 7.0).

Freedom House's rankings have become widely accepted and used by "policymakers, the media, international corporations, civic activists, and human rights defenders, to monitor trends in democracy and track improvements and setbacks in freedom worldwide."<sup>2</sup>

## Independent Variable – Integrity of State Memory Policy

For brevity, this variable is termed 'memory policy' but it represents *how* and to *what extent* an event is remembered in society; measured by the level of prominence it holds in the public, national and historical discourse of the state. The focus of this paper is on the *integrity* of that memory i.e. its historical accuracy, or whether the memory has been falsified or altered for the pursuance of political advantage. These concepts of memory move between positivist epistemology and the realm of meaning.

An EU report on European historical memory quoted the work of French historian Pierre Nora (1978; 398) to define this concept;

"The memory or the aggregate of memories, conscious or not, of an experience that was lived through and/or transformed into myth by a living collective body, of whose identity the sentiment of the past forms an integral part".

Although it is difficult to measure the integrity of memory, one can obtain, from political discourse and policy, local media and civil society; a gauge of the form memory policy takes and the extent to which it features in and is propagated by society.

## Methodology

### Case Selection

To empirically test these theories, I have selected the cases of Russia and Germany. The logic of choosing these cases comes from their variance in respect of the independent variable and their converse levels of democracy.

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<sup>2</sup> Freedom House, About Freedom in the World, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/event/european-launch-freedom-world-2013#.U2TiKPldUz4>



To analyse the hypothesis, I compare the significant differences in memory policy in Russia and Germany. Germany in the twenty first century is often described as the archetype of remembrance, while Russia is almost its antithesis in this regard.

Taken together, these cases supply interesting diverging perspectives from the angle of their respective policies of memory from which to analyse levels of democracy in the context of former Eastern Bloc states or 'states in transition'.

## Case Study Design

I have adopted a qualitative, comparative approach to my research. In order to determine the impact of memory policy on democracy, the time period observed is from 1945 to the present day. This gives the advantage of observing memory policy of a cross-section of major historical episodes for example World War II (WWII) and the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), in relation to current democratic trends.

Some cross-comparison occurs, where pertinent, in the case of Russia. This is due to the, often inconsistent way in which events such as WWII, the Holodomor and the Gulags are remembered. This will be analysed in comparison to Holocaust memory in Germany.

## Chapter One – Memory; A Discourse



*“A happy country does not agree about the future, but is basically in agreement about the past”*

Lord Dahrendorf (2004)

The study of memory has moved on from the discipline of psychoanalysis and theories of Freud and into modern day discourse. Politically linked to admittance of historical crimes, it finds relevance in areas such as conflict resolution, transitional justice, memorialisation, national identity and democracy.

According to Cohen (2001);

“Historical accountability is now an item on the international agenda. Countries which did not even pay lip service to democracy a decade ago are lining up to sign human rights declarations and adopt the rhetoric of accountability for past abuses.”

Memory, therefore, has become a root from which democracy can be analysed. The beginnings of this notion, and our theoretical ‘anchor’, emanate from French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs’ theories of ‘historical’ and ‘collective’ memory.

While collective memory is ‘socially constructed’; forming when people come together to remember; in essence “reconstructing the past in the light of the present” (Halbwachs 1990; 34), historical memory is “in contrast, something beyond specific groups in society; something that ‘moulds’ memory and attempts to attain one single objective historical truth” (Prutsch 2013; 10). ‘Memory politics’ can be seen as the search for this truth.

Halbwachs believed that “history can be represented” (Halbwachs 1992; 34) therefore it goes without saying that it can also be manipulated, revised and altered. Some scholars refer to this concept as ‘occupied memory’ which describes “efforts by political elites, their supporters and opponents, to construct meanings of the past and propagate them more widely or impose them on other members of society” (Halbwachs 1980; 85) thereby altering memory that is linked to historical truth. The

relationship between memory and democracy then is in *how* and *what* society is allowed to remember - and of course, what it is made to forget.

## **I. Reconciling the Past**

Misztal (2005), Tismaneanu (2008), Arendt (1958), Lebow (2006) and Adorno (2003) are just a few of the scholars who perceive a link between memory and democracy.

In 'The Human Condition' (1958), Hannah Arendt writes that it is "necessary for the continuation of action that we retain the traces of events, that we be reconciled with the past, divesting ourselves of anger and hatred." Surely there is greater possibility of this in a society where historical crimes and historical events are remembered faithfully and given a place of import in the public sphere, regardless of their morality?

For Lebow, the importance of memory is as a mediator between the past and present. "It lays the past to rest, or keeps it alive. It binds communities together, keeps them from forming or tears them apart" (Lebow 2006; 11).

The argument that 'integrity of memory' is a requirement for justice is based on the premise that "healthy democratic nations do acknowledge and reconcile their past pathologies and crimes so as not to repeat them, censor history, or forget its victims" (Misztal 2005; 1322). Acknowledging past crimes then, can be interpreted as one essential step in state transition from authoritarian or totalitarian rule, to democracy.

If history is censored and past crimes left unacknowledged, what then? Till (1999) and Barkan (2000) both believe that denying guilt devalues the importance of human rights, leaving a "legacy of shame" (Barkan 2000; 331). Lebow (2006; 6) agrees, but expands on this point, suggesting the implications extend beyond state borders;

"Memories and the policy lessons they generate or sustain, shape our responses to the present. They also influence external perceptions of and responses to a nation, and accordingly have powerful implications that extend beyond national borders."

## **II. Nazism, Communism and the Victim**

Neglect of the victim in memory is seen by Booth (2001; 781) as fundamental to the shape of future society;

“If the victims of mass crime are left faceless and nameless, if the hour, manner and place of their last moments are unknown, then they are outside the light of truth, lost to forgetting. The world is left incomplete; its integrity broken; its reality undermined.”

Tismaneanu (2008; 172) adds that; “no viable democracy can afford to accept amnesia, forgetfulness and the loss of memory. An authentic democratic community cannot be built on the denial of past crimes, abuses, and atrocities.” In a similar vein, Dejan Jovic (2004; 2) believes that truly democratic states allow pluralism of memory and therefore do not adhere to the concept of ‘official memories.’ This underscores the significance of freedom and free will in the theories of John Keane and Jürgen Habermas on democracy.

Memory and democratic disparity have reached international attention in recent years as former Eastern Bloc states call for the need to recognise the crimes of Communism on a par with crimes committed by the Nazi regime. This has surfaced in part due to Russia’s lack of acceptance and acknowledgement of its past and the responsibility it bares for the hardship it inflicted on Eastern Bloc states.

Tony Judt believes that the;

“Brutal, intolerant, authoritarian, and mutually-antagonistic regimes which spread over almost all the region in the years following World War I were cast into the dustbin of history and the many unpleasant truths about that part of the world were replaced by a single beautiful lie” (Judt 1992; 108).

He argues that while communism paid lip-service to the ideals of ‘equality, freedom, rights, cultural values and international unity’, in the end no one questioned the glaring hypocrisy. The once “common currency of hatred” (Judt 1992; 108) merely drifted into the past, amputated from the present and forced into the dark recesses of memory.

While Myszal(2005; 1324) agrees that “how to reconcile with a Communist past is part of the public agenda of almost all newly democratized Eastern European countries,” Tismaneanu (2008; 172) believes that; “symmetry of evil does not presume symmetry of memory.”

What is meant by this and what is important here is not the intimation that the Nazi and Communist regimes had the same agenda. Despite both being ideologically motivated, their manifestos were undeniably different. The former was ethnically driven; the latter driven by imperialist aspiration. It is not via the memory of the perpetrators that these crimes should be made equal; but via the memory of the injury they caused their victims. There the comparison is absolute.

As Prutsch (2013; 26) observes;

“the choice of Nazism and Stalinism as main reference points for a ‘European collective memory’ is consistent in that these two regimes and their policies embody an absolute contrast to the immanent ideals of peace, freedom and democracy, the rule of law, human rights and civil liberties, the right to individual self-determination and pluralism.”

While this is largely an argument for scholars; for the victims of these wrongs, acknowledgement, remembrance and commemoration are meaningless without the admission and contrition of the state that was answerable for them. Avoiding the past is avoiding accountability. While this may benefit those who committed the crimes, it offers no consolation to its victims. This is the critical link between history and memory.

### **III. Forming Meaning from the Past**

Keeping such painful recollections at the forefront of collective memory is therefore, in part, a question of respect to the victims of totalitarian regimes but also an important process from which to learn and improve the future.

Jan Assman (1997; 9) elaborates on collective memory, seeing it as being “concerned not with the past as such, but only with the past as it is remembered.” Halbwachs also defined it, not as the search for accuracy or integrity; but merely a state of ‘collective remembrance’ in which society as a whole recalls an event from a particular angle –real or manipulated. It is the social space or ‘feeling’ surrounding the ‘collective’ that shapes its memory.

Hegel connected history to collective memory by suggesting that ‘history’ is both ‘things that have happened’ and the ‘narration of things that have happened’ i.e. without a memory of the past, there can be no history. “Collective consciousness presumes collective memory, as without it there is no law and justice, no political structure and no collective objectives. Without ‘history’ there is no history and no state” (Hegel 1928; 97-98).

‘Historical memory’ can be said to be the integrity or historical truth behind a memory. Linked to history, it should be an accurate representation of historical facts, but often it is re-written or edited; elevated and mythologized to serve political aspiration which, once embedded in the ‘collective memory’, is almost impossible to retract.

History is not the search for morality. Nor is history the guardian of memory. History seeks truth; critically, analytically, objectively and factually. Memory belongs to the realm of meaning, of experience

and to the individual. Memory narrates history. Collectively, memory can represent a societal mood or feeling; a political agenda or even an era.

Individual, private memory represents something more truthful. This memory takes historical truth; moral or amoral, and embeds it in the psyche. Through critical reflection, this memory can eventually manifest as morality. It is this 'critical reflection' that Habermas saw as vital to unravelling and forming meaning from the past.

It is therefore in the recognition of 'accurate' or 'truthful' historical memory that the foundations of democracy can begin to take root. A memory that is distorted or controlled, or disregards its responsibility to the present, is a threat to those foundations.

Bell (2010; 20) also linked memory to political legitimacy, particularly during times of sudden political chaos;

“Perceptions of the past are essential in both de-legitimizing previous regimes – often through a process of excavating and confronting their crimes, or alternatively in attempting to airbrush them from the history books.”

After the collapse of Communism and the USSR, the transitions occurring across Eastern Europe, combined with the varying memories of its individual states, contributed to their notably differing memory policies. States seemed to lurch between total amnesia and aching nostalgia; a phenomenon that helped shape their contrasting national identities and forms of governance that to this day prove challenging to define.

This includes what lessons to take from the past (Ebenshade 1995; 73).

## Chapter Two – Memory in Russia



*“There are two different versions of the story of the end of the Cold War; the Russian version and the truth.”<sup>3</sup>*

Liz Cheney, Wall Street Journal

Russia says ‘liberation’, while the rest of Europe says ‘occupation’. Whether one uses the term ‘denial’ or ‘revisionism’, it is clear that Russia’s view of the Communist past differs from that of most former Eastern Bloc states.

While many have, and continue to successfully transition to some form of democracy, Russia possesses it in name alone; for since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia’s governing elites have shown a sustained reluctance to engage with their past: a past that the rest of Europe, and the Council of the European Union, can clearly recall;

“First, I do not think that in Europe there is any doubt on the very fact whether crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes had been at all committed by Communist totalitarian regimes, in particular by the Soviet Union. As it follows from the Statement, the EU Council does not have any such doubt either” (Jambrek 2008; 82).

### I. The Politics of Truth

Even the strongest and most powerful state would have difficulty erasing the memory of decades of totalitarianism entirely, yet for Russia it seems an ongoing objective: the crux of their ‘memory problem’ being “state falsification of history and manipulation of collective memory” (Ebenshade 1995; 76).

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<sup>3</sup> Cheney, L (2009) Obama Rewrites the Cold War, Wall Street Journal  
<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB124744075427029805?mg=reno64-wsj&url=http%3A%2F%2Fonline.wsj.com%2Farticle%2FSB124744075427029805.html>

Michel Foucault (1980; 131) suggested that “each society has its own regime of truth, or a ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the type of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true” leading us to believe in the co-existence of ‘multiple truths’ at different historical moments in time. Vividly applicable to Russia is a point made by Ebenshade (1995; 76) who said “memory also lies. At least as long as it offers a picture of heroism in the face of oppression.”

Brett et al (2007; 20) further suggest that “repression or neglect of history and memory remains both a bellwether of and a catalyst for other forms of repression,” a concept that would also appear to hold true in Russia; as evident in the dominant state control of media, politics, human rights and law; even down to the ‘revision’ of history in government endorsed school textbooks.

## II. The Foundations of Memory and Denial

Russia’s historical narrative is founded on the ‘Great Patriotic’ or ‘Great Fatherland’ War, their monikers for WWII. Indisputably a very real historical event, it is one from which the Russian nation has defined itself as hero, liberator and victim; a decoy that conceals its other role; as perpetrator.

Official discourse has, over time, hijacked the Russian nation’s collective memory. Despite a conceivably ‘noble’ purpose i.e. national unity and solidarity; this ‘occupied memory’ has become ingrained in the national psyche or collective memory. It has prevented guilt, reflection and apology and a self-critical ‘working through of the past’ which Habermas (1981) and Adorno (1986) believe is vital for *true* democracy to exist.

In 1987, Mikhail Gorbachev’s policy of Glasnost edged the country towards democracy, allowing “Soviet citizens the first opportunity to look back at their Communist past and examine some of its darkest moments” (Stan 2009; 46).

In the semi-authoritarian era of Vladimir Putin however, those memories of a less-than-noble past once brought to international attention, have been submerged once again under nationalist discourse and imperialistic political ideology. As Sherlock (2011; 95) observes; “the Kremlin under Putin made it known that unrestrained attacks on the Soviet past were no longer acceptable.”

Collective memory of the Gulags (Soviet forced-labour camps) or the Holodomor (the Ukrainian famine of 1932-1933, said to have been deliberately instigated by Stalin), does not exist in Russia. There is no ‘space’ in which people can communicate on the subject. Survivor stories remain with individuals alone, in isolation. Their memories have not permeated public discourse or been allowed to form as a



collective memory as much as was necessary in order that lessons could be learned from their past. “The state prevented them from becoming part of national remembrance” (Khazanov 2008; 296).

In Russia “only nine percent of the population believe that Soviet victory led to the Stalinist occupation of Eastern Europe” (Sherlock 2011; 104). That so few believe what millions know to be fact seems absurd; almost implausible, and yet this is an example of ‘state sanctioned’ collective memory in action.

### III. A Heroic Narrative

Khazanov considers the secret service and military backgrounds of the ruling elites to be a possible determining factor of the need to re-invent a heroic historical narrative. Putin and his colleagues, Khazanov (2008; 305) writes “do not belong to the generation of repentance; they are the children of defeat.” Perhaps it was owing to these disillusioned memories that their desire for an infallible national identity was created; one that could outlive the negative reality, regardless of its lack of resemblance to historical truth.

In a state of the nation address in 2005, Putin stated that “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century was...”<sup>4</sup> not the two World wars, the Holocaust, the Holodomor or the Gulags; but “...the collapse of the USSR.”<sup>5</sup> Absolving Stalin’s terror as a price paid for the ‘great achievements’ of the Soviet Union, he epitomises the cavernous difference of opinion between Russia and the rest of Europe. Through denial, Putin has arrested memory in Russia, replacing it with a re-worked collective version that has reduced the capacity to openly ‘work through’ the real, unedited version of Russia’s past.

While the collapse of Communism was a catalyst for meaningful change across the rest of Eastern Europe, in Russia it inspired national mourning and a new identity. With national pride at the forefront of Russian memory policy, remembrance of crimes perpetrated *by* the state would have severely damaged the veneer of heroism.

In Russia, Siddi believes, “a European memory of responsibility would conflict with stronger national narratives, where negative or shameful experiences have been marginalised to make room for those that encourage pride and identification with the nation” (Siddi 2012; 97).

While;

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<sup>4</sup> BBC (2005) Putin deplores collapse of USSR, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4480745.stm>

<sup>5</sup> Osborn, A (2005) Putin: Collapse of the Soviet Union was 'Catastrophe of the Century', The Independent <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/putin-collapse-of-the-soviet-union-was-catastrophe-of-the-century-6147493.html>

“Soviet soldiers and civilians *were*, in absolute numbers, Communism’s greatest victims; while the Red Army *did* liberate vast swathes of Eastern Europe from the horrors of German rule; and while the defeat of Hitler *was* a source of unalloyed satisfaction and relief for most Soviet citizens...” (Judt; 2005: 5)

...these realities have been glorified to the exclusion of one singularly essential historical fact – that they perpetrated crimes of their own.



Photograph 1.

#### IV. Individual and Collective Responsibility

Tony Judt (2005; 4) described the onslaught of memory after the collapse of the Communist regime and how it “brought in its wake a torrent of bitter memories. Heated debates over what to do with secret police files were only one dimension of the affair. The real problem was the temptation to overcome the memory of Communism; by inverting it.”

This problem can be characterized as the ‘normalisation’ of memory in society; a theory affirmed by Cohen (2001) who believed that “denial can be shared, social, collective and organised.”

Russia’s tool for building an imperial future is based on “obedience, belief in the political leader (Putin-cult), social and political cohesion, a feeling of togetherness and the glorious nation,” (Volk 2009; 56),

but it is not unity in the 'democratic' sense. Rather it is unquestioning compliance and submission; free of independent thought and integrity of memory. If we are to take this in the light of the reflections of Aristotle, Hegel, Habermas and Keane on freedom as a proponent of democracy, the very act of suppressing or altering public memory can be seen as 'undemocratic'.

While some would argue that Russians are responsible for their fate, through the election of Putin as their leader, Theodore Adorno's (1944) writings on enlightenment shed light on a possible reason for their choices; "all are free to dance and enjoy themselves...to join any of the innumerable sects. But freedom to choose an ideology - since ideology always reflects economic coercion - everywhere proves to be freedom to choose what is always the same."<sup>6</sup> Essentially this suggests that Russian's have little 'real' choice; either in the political or moral sphere.

Creating a new and believable historical narrative is no small achievement. In doing so Russian elites have not only had to suppress historical truth but consistently influence the memory of millions. Rather than acknowledge crimes committed in the name of Communism, it was the heroic deeds of the Red Army that became the focus for the state's memory policy.

However, the problem with this illusory memory is not only what it remembers but what it forgets. Inflated heroism has overshadowed the reality of 'history's most terrifying peace'<sup>7</sup>, as TIME Magazine named the end of WWII; a period in which an estimated three million Germans<sup>8</sup> died unnecessarily and often brutally at the Red Army's 'liberating' hand.

While Russia's victory in WWII today merits a national holiday; the view of the Soviet Union as 'occupier' of the East barely merits mention in state discourse. In Russia the mass surveillance and annexation of Eastern Europe begins to pass into myth. Consigned to a memory marked 'unfortunate sacrifice' are the millions who perished in Stalin's Holodomor. Denied justice are the thousands who perished in the forests of Katyn. Unfortunately, this continued amnesia of Communist and Stalinist crimes diminishes the very image of legitimacy that Russia tries to create.

However, in spite of such an 'occupied' collective memory, Cohen (1995; 18, 2000; 13) has no doubt that private and individual memories remain intact (after all, could anyone truly 'forget' such a

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<sup>6</sup> Adorno, T (1944) The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception, Dialectic of Enlightenment, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/adorno/1944/culture-industry.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Time magazine issue of Oct. 15, 1945, [http://search.time.com/results.html?No=180&sid=146662226692&Ns=p\\_date\\_range|1&N=0&Nf=p\\_date\\_range%7cBTWN+19451001+19451031&Nty=1](http://search.time.com/results.html?No=180&sid=146662226692&Ns=p_date_range|1&N=0&Nf=p_date_range%7cBTWN+19451001+19451031&Nty=1)

<sup>8</sup> Weber, M (2009) An 'Unknown Holocaust' and the Hijacking of History - An address by Mark Weber, director of the Institute for Historical Review, delivered at an IHR meeting in Orange County, California, on July 25, <http://www.ihr.org/other/july09weber.html>

distressing past?), it is just that they remain in the private sphere. If they were to enter the public domain; become part of public discourse, acceptance would eventually lead to ‘acknowledgement’ (Cohen 1995; 18); the consequences of which are numerous and significant.

Acknowledgement leads to an acceptance of culpability; to a state of responsibility. There can be no repentance without the feeling of guilt and responsibility. But, as Cohen (2001) writes, “the line between denial and acknowledgement is the hardest to sustain.” Russia’s rendering of its collective historical memory, although in the public domain, has not led to a critical evaluation of the past, nor derived any lessons from it. It has abdicated responsibility and distanced itself further from democracy by continuing to deny historical truth.

## **V. Refuge in Forgetting**

The rise and struggle of Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) such as Memorial; consistently denied political and governmental support, is proof that a simultaneous desire for re-awakening memory and an inability to acknowledge and come to terms with the past simultaneously co-exist in Russia.

Society as a whole in Russia appears to have taken refuge in state-sanctioned collective memory; in the process of collective forgetting. Similarly, by taking refuge in authoritarianism, society is absolved of the need to make decisions on its future or accept responsibility for its past. The demands of the state are held above those of the conscience, dictating its recollections. If the state does not deem it necessary to accept responsibility for the past, then the population equally are not required to do so. Cohen (2001) describes this condition as “solidarity with an undemocratic power.”

This helps explain why organisations like Memorial are in a minority. They are swimming against a tide of denial. Even Russian literature promulgated the patriotic belief that suffering was good for people; until Varlam Shalamov’s heart-rending survival story of the Gulags, ‘Kolyma Tales’, completely discredited this premise (Khazanov 2008; 300).

Rosoux (2004; 163) feels that “the work of memory is a process that can only emerge from the parties themselves,” however Putin is seemingly unwilling to shoulder the burden for the crimes of the Soviet Union alone. While moral responsibility must begin with the state; entrenched in denial, Putin’s ‘managed democracy’ is unwilling to resurrect the truth about Communism. More importantly, there is little will in Russia to “understand the moral significance of what took place” (Satter 2012; 2).

Cohen (1995; 47) describes this mass denial and obliteration of the past as a “dislocation from historical time” achieved by “weakening or redefining the relationship with what has gone before and what currently exists” in theory creating a ‘barrier to memory.’

## **VI. Hero versus Victim**

What Russia has failed to come to terms with during its process of historical adaptation is that hero worship is no longer fashionable in present European discourse. The Holocaust saw a decided shift towards honouring the memory of the victim over that of the hero; a notion seldom embraced in Russia. Zhurzhenko (2007; 5) describes this as Russia “speaking to Europe in an obsolete language,” believing it easier for ‘victim states’ to come to terms with their pasts because they have a “historical advantage by enjoying the moral credit” (Zhurzhenko 2007; 5). Though Russia can claim some ‘victim rights’; its role as perpetrator has for the most part diluted this status.

In preserving such a dominant narrative, the memory of the victims is suppressed; causing the country to alienate itself further from its neighbours. The need for greater integrity in Russia’s memory policy is therefore of paramount importance; not only for its citizens, but for relations with neighbouring states. Yeltsin and Gorbachev both saw the value of acknowledging the past and the responsibility resulting from it in order to gain the support of the West. Putin however, appears to seek neither such approval nor alliance.

Volk (2009; 51) places the accent on memory, remembrance and the past as products of “an ongoing, conscious, or unconscious process of narrative construction which is initiated, guided or perhaps even controlled by various actors.” Russia, thanks to its political and geographic isolation from the West, was rarely subjected to such external control. Sustained internal oppression and external isolation could be seen as the price Russia has had to pay for its questionable memory policy. Or, it could even be the reason for it.

As Europe tries to forge a new ‘European Memory,’ the former Iron Curtain has once again become a frontline; this time of a memory war.

## Chapter Three – Memory in Germany



*“All people face an uncertain future, but no nation can consolidate around an uncertain past.”*

Greene et al (2010; 5)

On the scale of its inhumanity, the Holocaust overshadows almost every historical tragedy before it and since.

For Jürgen Habermas, the mass dehumanisation employed by the Third Reich represented a complete breakdown of respect; a social requirement of humankind. He argued that the weight of coming to terms with and taking responsibility for such a past led to a “complete breakdown in rationality” (Schiller 2012; 49).

Although Habermas was not speaking directly of memory, his theory that all beings should employ self-critical analysis can be applied to the process of remembering the past. He believed morality and ethics, the essential building blocks of democracy, resulted from such a practice.

This is the process Germany and its citizens eventually undertook in their memory of the Holocaust; however, it was by no means a *fait accompli*.

### **I. A Duty to Remember and a Longing to Forget**

German *Geschichtspolitik* (politics of history) is an unending battle in which Germans seemingly want to reconcile “both a duty to remember and a longing to forget” (Kramer 1996; 258).

On a state visit to Poland in December 1970 at a commemoration to the Jewish victims of Kristallnacht, the then German Chancellor Willy Brandt famously fell to his knees in apology. He later said of his actions, “carrying the burden of the millions who were murdered, I did what people do when words fail them.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Cohen, R (2013) A Time for Courage, New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/22/opinion/cohen-a-time-for-courage.html>



Photograph 2.

Brandt saw the future of Germany as one inseparable from its past; from the Holocaust; one of remembrance, apology and repentance, a *Sonderweg* or ‘special path’. For subsequent Chancellor Helmut Kohl, the ‘father of unification,’ *Sonderweg* symbolised disparity. He wanted to unite with the West as an equal and “no longer be abnormal but finally firmly anchored in Western culture and ethics” (Habermas 1994; 9-11). However, Germany’s ‘path’ was anything but normal.

Undoing the work of Brandt; going as far as to oppose campaigns calling for younger generations to remember the crimes of the Nazi regime (Wicke 2013), Kohl sanctioned the ‘normalisation’ of Germany and with it the Holocaust; an approach that Jürgen Habermas fiercely rejected. Habermas (1994) was adamant that the memory of the Holocaust should always retain its potency, saying “we must accept the presence of the past as a ‘burden’ on moral accountability” (Habermas 1994; 9-11). Misztal (2005; 1323) agrees with Habermas, avowing that the Holocaust must never be forgotten or ‘normalized.’

On its historical path, Wicke (2013) wrote of Germany; “the question of whether Germany as a nation had undergone an abnormal historical trajectory outside the West has become one of the most important historiographical questions of the post-war era.”

For Kohl, the answer to this question was a ‘victim Germany’; occupied and held hostage for twelve dark years along with the rest of Europe. Thankfully for succeeding Chancellor Gerhard Schröder the future meant upholding a position of moral obligation.

## II. The Future of Memory

On the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, Schröder recognized the magnitude of the memory of the Holocaust and transmitted its intention to the world; “the memory of the war and the genocide are part of our life. Nothing will change that; these memories are part of our identity.”<sup>10</sup>

In doing so, Schröder evoked the importance of Maurice Halbwachs theory that finding ways of engaging with the past enabled ‘a working-through’ of it, leading to a democratic process that would function in the present. Germany did so to such an extent that it turned this thought into a single phrase; ‘*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*’ - ‘coming to terms with the past’. It is a principle that holds to this day and has shaped not only Germany’s memory policy but also its foreign policy; now acting as an advocate for democratic values and human rights on the international stage.

Holocaust memory has changed not only the political landscape of Germany, but also the geographical one, with memorials and sites of commemoration visible across the country, though most intensively concentrated in the capital, Berlin.



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<sup>10</sup> The Guardian (2005), Berlin Dispatch, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/oct/11/worlddispatch>



### **III. The Past cannot be Undone**

Though it was not until the 1960s to 1980s that the “foundations for the iconographic status of the Holocaust” (Levy; Sznajder 2002; 95-6) were laid; largely borne out of pressure from allied forces, it is inconceivable to imagine what the landscape of German democracy would look like today had external pressure not made them answerable; had Germany justified the atrocities of the Holocaust as a consequence of building a greater nation, like Russia, or followed Helmut Kohl’s path of insisting it too was merely a ‘victim’ of the Nazi regime.

Schröder believed that remembering the Holocaust was a “part of Germany’s self-understanding” stating;

“The past can neither be undone nor can it be overcome. But one can learn from history and that is what we Germans have done. Memory of the National Socialist period, of war, genocide, and crime has become part of our national identity.”

As it is, by the end of the Cold War Germany was beginning the process of full accountability for Nazi crimes; to the extent that their character has been woven into the narrative of the everyday lives of all German citizens; from their education system and cultural institutions to the environment that surrounds them.

Sixty-nine years after the Holocaust and with many of its survivors no longer alive to tell their stories, it is the question of how to deal with its evolving memory that lives on in Germany.

### **IV. Collective Memory; Collective Guilt**

This memory, Levy and Sznajder (2002; 18) believe is “the memory of a shared past. It is not shared due to some mythical desire and the belonging to some continuing community of fate, but as the product of a reflexive choice to incorporate the suffering of the ‘Other’.”

Some scholars argue over the existence of ‘collective guilt’ and ‘collective responsibility’ however, for Franklin Roosevelt, its existence was clear. In a speech made just after WWII, he said;

“Too many people here and in England hold to the view that the German people as a whole are not responsible for what has taken place. That unfortunately is not based on fact. The German people

as a whole must have it driven home to them that the whole nation has been engaged in a lawless conspiracy against the decencies of modern civilization.”<sup>11</sup>

Central to the memory debate, Habermas saw a relationship between collective memory and national responsibility that could only be brought about if memory was ‘alive’ or in the public sphere. It had to be visible. Misztal (2005; 1323) agrees that “it wasn’t enough that it was just in the minds of the population.”

I would extend this theory further by suggesting that the ‘integrity’ of the memory must also remain intact. If altered; for some political or ideological objective, false memory – even though in the ‘collective memory’- cannot lead to acceptance of responsibility; nationally or otherwise. Polish poet and diplomat Czeslaw Milosz (1991; 281) also saw the *integrity* of memory as imperative, writing; "those who are alive receive a mandate from those who are dead and silent forever; to preserve the truth about the past."

According to Gilbert (2002; 118), collective guilt also serves a practical purpose. Where justification or denial of a crime leads victims to feel aggrieved by the perpetrator, genuine guilt and remorse can bring about forgiveness and eventual forging of relations, as has occurred between Germany and the Jewish community in Israel.

## **V. A New Confidence through Remembrance**

Lebow (2006; 7) also reflected on the implications of a negative memory policy on Germany’s relationship with its neighbours, and in turn its democratic status. On neighbouring states, he wrote;

“Would they have bound themselves to a Germany in which the rule of law was threatened by authoritarian political movements...or even a Germany in which the political and intellectual elite refused to acknowledge the special burden placed on them by the crimes of the Nazi era?”

Despite bearing sole accountability for the Holocaust, Germany today is classified ‘Free’ with an overall rating of 1 (the highest available) according to the Freedom in the World survey published by Freedom House. Russia today, conversely, is classified as ‘Not Free’ with a rating of 5.5.<sup>12</sup>

What seems clear from the case of Germany is something that Russia has not conceived; that even a negative event (and few could claim one of such harrowing scale as Germany), can be used to unite a

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<sup>11</sup> Memorandum by President Roosevelt to the Secretary of War <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1944v01/d311>

<sup>12</sup> Freedom House, Freedom of the World Ratings, 2014 <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-world#.U5m3JvldUz4>

nation. Memory discourse does not have to be heroic to unify. By uniting through responsibility and recognition of guilt, Germany continues to evaluate its place in the world through the lens of their most shameful role in history. And it does them credit.

According to Ruth Wittlinger (2013; 18); rather than causing Germany to become an international pariah through 'negative nationalism'; Schröder's recognition of culpability achieved the opposite result; it inspired a new confidence through remembrance.

## **VI. The Past as a Warning**

Another positive outcome of Germany's memory policy is noted by Bell (2006; 13) who further believes that Germany's past has characterised its present sense of social responsibility and aversion to war, through recollection of the hardships suffered in its past. Primo Levi agrees, attesting to the importance of remembering the past.

Himself a survivor of the Holocaust, when asked what he would do with the concentration camps, Levi (1994; 18) said he would leave them as "warning monuments." His view places value on the integrity of memory; the need for preserving it and keeping it whole in the collective memory, regardless of how painful its revelations.

Though Russia may disagree, Geyer and Latham (2007; 12) believe that denying history by forgetting the past does not make their guilt disappear. On the contrary, such actions only cause damage to the present (Geyer et al 1997; 12), a parallel Russia has so far refused to recognise.

Tismaneanu (1998; 116) reinforces this point;

"To ask for a serious coming to grips with the past is not simply a moral imperative: none of these societies can become truly liberal if the old mythologies of self-pity and self-idealization continue to monopolize the public discourse."

Germany has neither embraced self-pity nor turned the Holocaust into historical myth, consigning it to the past. Integrity of memory has been maintained through accurate remembrance of the realities of the Holocaust. Using photographs and figures; the visual combined with the factual, Germany has woven the narrative of the Holocaust into everyday life, using it as the foundation on which to re-construct democracy.

The Holocaust's omnipresent memory highlights the fragility and impermanence of humanity. Through critical analysis and legal sanctioning of a collective memory based on fact; the backbone of Germany's

political future has come to rest on the awareness that a possible ‘future Holocaust’ lies just around the corner; waiting for memory to fail before occurring once more.

Germany believes it is only by *not* allowing the past to be forgotten that this can never happen again.

## Conclusions

### Summary of Findings

*“Behind the actor stands the storyteller, but behind the storyteller stands a community of memory.”*

Hannah Arendt, (Passerin d'Entrèves 2002)

This paper set out to explore whether a state’s memory policy impacts on its level of democracy. The initial reason and motivation for the selection of this particular research question came about principally due to the prominence memory discourse has gained over the last several years, and its potential uses.

Memory; and the subject of what to do with it, emerged from the destruction of WWII largely in response to the abject immorality of the Holocaust. It continues to feature in the areas of transitional justice and human rights in the present day, regarded as an instrument of conflict resolution in the aftermath of the genocides in Rwanda and Srebrenica, in the decision-making process on EU accession of Balkan states such as Serbia and also in the discussion of transitional justice; on many continents but more significantly, in this case, in Eastern Europe.

However, the purpose and necessity of ‘memory’ remains a controversial theme.

The theoretical implications of my research expand on existing theories of memory to further examine the importance of *integrity* of historical memory as having the greatest impact on democracy.

I have supported my argument by analysing a breadth of scholarly material, which has largely uncovered to varying degrees, consensus that memory influences the components that constitute democracy.

The theoretical contribution of Maurice Halbwachs on 'collective memory' sets the framework on which memory can be constructed and understood. By focusing on collective and historical memory, it is possible to understand how memory is affected by society and vice versa. Through revisionism and destruction of the *integrity* of this memory, the motives behind state policy are often revealed.

The theories of Arendt, Hegel, Habermas and Keane develop and widen the original notion of democracy given by Aristotle and, through philosophical and critical scrutiny, position it in the context of the present day. Arendt's view that the past should be remembered and 'worked through' in order to avoid its mistakes is frequently echoed by scholars Adorno, Misztal and Barkan whose theories on denial relate to those of Keane and Habermas' on free will and morality as fundamentals of democracy.

Further positive links to memory and democracy have been made by scholars such as Gonchurak (2013; 6) and O'Donnell and Schmitter (1991; 30) who are of the mutual opinion that it is impossible to construct or support a functioning democracy prior to dealing with memory, once again echoing Arendt et al's theories of learning from the past through acknowledgement of it.

The salient point of my research for this paper centres on the polarising 'integrity' of the memory policies adopted in Russia and Germany respectively. It reveals in Russia a memory edited for political control, while highlighting the unconditional acceptance of historical truth in the memory policy of Germany.

A visible parallel exists between how the past is remembered and the level of democracy present in each state. The difference in integrity of memory of these two states is therefore effectively the difference between admittance and denial; between acceptance and blame and between democracy and authoritarianism.

My findings have expanded on the theories of the aforementioned scholars to specifically search for and develop this correlation between memory policy and democracy.

I believe that while some form of democracy can exist without 'memory,' its foundation would be primarily economic, nationalistic or political. While it may function well enough and have the appearance of a true liberal democracy, it would lack the moral dimension that comes with having freedom of memory; freedom to process and explore individual and collective memories - especially those that conceal trauma and guilt. Therefore, memory must have plurality. Individual memory *must* have a 'space' for it to construct an accurate, meaningful and ultimately *useful* collective memory.

On further evaluation it does not seem possible for *true* democracy to exist alongside a national identity that is constructed on denial of historical crimes and suppression of historical truth in collective memory, hence the need for complete transparency and ‘integrity’ of memory.

It is only possible to work through the past if acknowledged in its entirety or else how can a state or a people declare ‘never again!?’ If collective memory is distorted, the crucial lessons can never be learned. As David Satter (2012; 141) reflected; “the Soviet Union’s crimes lie beneath Russia’s surface deepening moral confusion and facilitating the rise of a new nationalist and authoritarian regime.”

The ardent need for a common truth to be absolutely, openly and universally recognised is profoundly illustrated by Weschler (1990; 4); “the process of truth transforming into collective memory is a mysterious, powerful almost magical notion,” and a concept of indispensable value to the victims of historical crimes.

This ‘transformation’ promotes apology, healing, restitution and a ‘moving forward’ from the past; while retaining it in the collective memory – as an aide memoire.

In an era of European unity and the ever-emerging call for a ‘European memory’ Heidemarie Uhl (2009; 67) summarised the European viewpoint on East European memory;

“Europe will not be united unless it is able to form a common view of its history, recognises Nazism, Stalinism and Fascist and Communist regimes as a ‘common legacy’ and brings about an ‘honest and thorough’ debate on all totalitarian crimes in the past century.”

In conclusion, continuing to dismiss its burden of guilt, Russia has set itself the unending task of trying to purge the more shameful episodes of its past from public memory. However, forgetting is merely a drawing of reality away from the conscious mind. This in itself cannot entirely obliterate the existence of memory. Every experience leaves a physical and mental trace. If its existence is not recognised or accepted then a dislocation occurs of memory from conscience, without which no real democracy can exist.

Hamber and Wilson (2002; 35) understand, as Germany has, that remembering and consequently acknowledging historical crimes can bring about unity and reconciliation. Germany has turned its historical, political and collective memory into a ‘cultural memory’ - not as a reprimand but as a shared national responsibility that allows and actively encourages the nation to mourn, to remember and to reflect in order to, as Hegel observed, “reconcile oneself with reality in order to be at peace with the

world” (Arendt 1961; 8). The moral significance of this lesson is one that Russia does not appear ready, or willing to learn.

## Limitations and Areas for Further Research

The limitation of length was the primary restriction affecting my thesis. In researching the theme of memory; while attempting to adhere primarily to the subject of its integrity, it became clear that the scale of this debate was extensive and multifaceted.

In selecting my specific approach, other perspectives were obviously forgone. Therefore I would like to outline a few possible avenues for further research along the theme of memory.

Further study would benefit from examining the reasoning behind a state’s particular memory policy. This includes areas such as religion, national identity and authoritarian governance; levels of external influence, the state’s role in a historical event and the relationship between the state and the individual in society.

One argument speculates that religious and secular societies identify more with the concept of innocence rather than guilt, leading to denial and an inability to acknowledge or admit past crimes. As David Satter (2012; 173) observed; “at a psychological level, this failure is easy to understand. If the Russian state has a special, God-given role, it almost by definition could not have been guilty of mass crimes”, offering one reason for Russia’s alternative memory policy.

Another influencing factor is that of pressure from external forces. In Germany, the need for acceptance by the West led Germany to acquiesce to the demands made by allied forces with regards its memory policy; beginning the unending process of atonement. Russia, with its ever-increasing separation from the West, feels less inclined to submit to such external pressure.

The position of the state versus the individual is one often depicted by intellectuals in Russia. Yet these views remain detached from the reality of a state which retains a ‘sacred’ status, yet ‘frequently deprives the individual of the most fundamental of rights’ (Satter 2012; 175). The implication here is that individuals must bear some responsibility for their past. As Habermas expressed; “regardless of how deeply the state penetrates into their lives, there is still some particular knowledge that is singularly theirs. Ultimately, then, they cannot simply follow orders and obey absolutely. Rather, each individual is accountable for his/her actions” (Schiller 2012; 45).

As touched on earlier, conformity to state revisionism could be seen as a function of the individual to absolve itself of historical responsibility; being led by the state until he/she cannot recall any ‘real’ memories of his/her own.

In further exploring these and other theories my hope is that a greater understanding of what states need to do in terms of dealing with their pasts can be realised. Ultimately to develop techniques that better equip society in the aftermath of atrocities; enabling the process of conciliation and reparation, and restoring relations with neighbouring states.

I would like to end my research with a quote from Tony Judt (2005; 10), who eloquently and emotively sums up the importance of memory and remembering in twenty first century Europe;

“If in years to come we are to remember why it seemed so important to build a certain sort of Europe out of the crematoria of Auschwitz, only history can help us. The new Europe, bound together by the signs and symbols of its terrible past, is a remarkable accomplishment; but it remains forever mortgaged to that past. If Europeans are to maintain this vital link—if Europe's past is to continue to furnish Europe's present with admonitory meaning and moral purpose—then it will have to be taught afresh with each passing generation. "European Union" may be a response to history, but it can never be a substitute.”



Photograph 4.





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